

Morris

W. James

ADDRESS

OF THE

COMMISSION OF SYNOD

OF

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA,

(In connection with the Church of Scotland.)

TO THE

PEOPLE UNDER THEIR CHARGE.

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ADDRESS.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

WE, the Ministers and Elders of the Commission of Synod, and your Rulers in the Lord, feeling deeply impressed with the peculiar state of our Church at the present juncture, and taking into account the fears that now perplex the minds of men on civil affairs, feel ourselves called upon at this our Special Meeting, in the City of Toronto, to address you briefly on matters in which we are well assured you feel the most intense interest.

The Resolutions which the Synod, after mature deliberation, passed at its last meeting, have been submitted to your inspection, and, we trust, have met with your cordial approbation. These Resolutions, you will perceive, embrace no new ground. The Synod of Canada has throughout the whole of this painful and momentous business, which has to a less or greater extent been a subject of inquiry and discussion for nearly twenty years, neither enlarged nor narrowed the position which was at first taken. With us there has been no change of views, no disguise, no equivocation. Indeed, those who act from a sacred regard to the well defined principles of equity, are neither exposed to the reproach that attends vacillation, nor the shame that awaits detected artifice. Our claims at first were rights, the validity of which has been in the fullest and most emphatic terms conceded by every authority to which reference or appeal has been made. Some of these authorities, as you are aware, are the highest to which men are accustomed to look either for counsel or final decision. Yet, strange to say, these rights have hitherto been withheld, while the establishment of the Rectories has threatened their annihilation. This shall not—this must not be. These rights we never, never shall relinquish, but by every constitutional means shall continue to demand what no righteous Government, when the matter is brought fully before it, can refuse to grant. At the same time, it is painful to confess that our rights have not only been withheld, but the party most active in this, have grossly misrepresented the nature of our demands, as well as our ulterior views in reference both to the Rectories and the Clergy Reserves.

It has been said that we seek the destruction of the Episcopal Church in Upper Canada. The charge, let it be made by whomsoever it may,—and it has been made by high authority—is a vile slander. Conscientious Presbyterians as we are,—regarding, as we honestly do, the Episcopal Church of England as far, very far indeed, from giving a fair embodiment of Apostolic forms and practice in its establishment and ecclesiastical polity,—still we should but ill merit the name of Protestant Christians, did we not regard with veneration and esteem, a Church which has done such essential service to our common Christianity, by her distinguished learning and piety. Let it, therefore, be distinctly borne in mind, that we entertain no hostile feeling to the Episcopal Church, as a section of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The field for the usefulness of the sister Church in this Province is abundantly large; and while her Ministers labour to cultivate the moral wastes, gather in the outcasts of Israel, and build up the walls of Zion, we can most cordially bid them God speed; and by how much the more successful they are in disseminating the precious doctrines of the cross, the more shall we rejoice. But when the Episcopal Church would be unjust, she must be restrained; and when she would be arrogant, she must be repressed; and when, in madness, she would take a position which would be at once fatal to her own usefulness, and utterly destructive of all genuine loyalty in the country, she must be repelled. Calmly, but firmly, must the claims which she now puts forth be repelled. They are unjust, arrogant, and, in the present temper of the times, unspeakably mischievous.

We say it, before God, and in the face of the world—and we say it more in grief than in anger—that the attempts to establish a Dominant Church in Upper Canada, have done more to alienate the affections of the people from their Rulers than the wisest of those rulers seem to be fully aware of. We cannot, we dare not, disguise our solemn conviction, that this measure carried fully out and all is lost. The most malignant ingenuity bent upon the destruction of this fair province, could have devised no measure better fitted to bring about the disastrous result. Did we, brethren, feel less attachment to our invaluable Constitution—were our loyalty but feeble, and our zeal for British connection less ardent, we might on this matter speak with greater coolness. But knowing well what interests are involved in the present struggle, and knowing how much the issue of that struggle must depend on the measure to which we have referred, we cannot but give utterance to the honest, the ardent emotions of our hearts.

But then, it has been said, all this is but selfishness under a thin disguise. It is affirmed that we wish the Rectories put down, and the Episcopal Church stripped of her high precedency, merely that we may engross the emoluments, and occupy the envied distinction to which she now lays claim. If our enemies

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will give us no credit either for loyalty or honesty, we beg they will at least give us credit for a little caution and rational fear. We therefore declare, in the most unqualified terms, whatever men may say or think to the contrary, that there is hardly any one thing that could fill us with greater dread than to see the Church of Scotland placed in the position which the sister Church of England seems so ambitious to secure, in Upper Canada. When did we ever ask for exclusive rights? When did we ever take one step to obtain a dominant influence? In what way have we ever sought to rob other Protestant churches of their rights? Have not all our demands been reasonable? Have not all our measures been liberal? What, then, is the meaning of this senseless and base outcry about the duplicity and concealed arrogance of the Presbyterian Church? Let us be heard on this matter once for all. There can no more be two than one Dominant Church in this Province. It is the most preposterous folly to imagine it possible that there ever can. At the same time, brethren, we are no enemies to an endowment by the state for the support of pure religion.—Hence we conceive that it was a most wise and generous measure in the Imperial Government to set apart a portion of the Wild Lands for the support of a Protestant Clergy; and we hold that each of the great sections of the Protestant Church should receive its proper share of the proceeds of the Reserves; and for ourselves we demand a proportionate share with the Church of England, and in every respect to be put on an equal footing with her. Let this arrangement be made, and we are well assured that the alarms which have taken possession of the minds of men will be dissipated—confidence restored, harmony among Christians secured, and the interests of the Church of Christ greatly advanced. What sacrifices ought not to be made to bring about results so invaluable as these?

It has afforded us the highest pleasure, Christian Brethren, to see from the resolutions which have been passed in the greater part of our congregations, the decided and prudent course which you have deemed it befitting you to take in giving expression to your views on the matters to which we have referred.—You will perceive from the resolutions submitted to you, that the Synod had devolved upon us the duty of petitioning the Legislature, as well as the duty of directing the movements of our people in bringing their just complaints under the eye of the Government. We are fully aware that a strong wish is now extensively felt to make a universal movement by public meetings and petitions, with a view of having the act establishing the Rectories repealed, and our just rights granted. To this wish we cannot at present give our sanction; nor do we deem it expedient to give immediate effect to the recommendation of the Synod.

It is only a few months since we were called upon to give thanks to Almighty God, for deliverance from the threatened horrors of civil war. The

horizon is again dark. Revolt has again broke out in the neighbouring Province ; and, although we fondly hope that the fears of good men may prove groundless, and the expectations of wicked men may be utterly blasted, still, it must be evident to you that, under existing circumstances, it would be highly inexpedient to take any steps by which the angry passions of men may be excited, the public attention distracted, or the hands of the Government in such an emergency weakened. God forbid, Brethren, that we should do aught to embarrass the Government, or aid in any way the wicked devices of traitorous men. Nor do we conceive that much can now be gained by petitioning the Legislature. To suppose that the Government needs yet to be informed of what is the mind of the public on these matters to which the petitions would refer, is an insult to the observation and understanding of our rulers ; and to suppose that the Government is fully aware of the mind of the public, and yet resolved to treat it with reckless indifference, were to believe that that last and sorest curse which could befall a people, has befallen us—an infatuation—a fatal blindness in the rulers of the people. Far be it from us to suppose, that this curse of Almighty God has yet come upon us.

You know well, Brethren, that we are not in the habit of giving flattering titles to our rulers. We are convinced that our loyalty is much better shown by deeds than by words, and better shown when uttered in words, in the simple, manly and honest language of the heart, than in high-flown eulogy.—At the same time we apprehend, that under the peculiar circumstances in which the country is placed, we are called upon to declare our entire confidence in the wisdom and integrity of the Lieutenant Governor ; and our conviction, that when he is more fully acquainted with the state of the colony, and the character of the people, he will pursue an enlightened, liberal, and conciliating policy. It is easy to perceive that in such a crisis as the present, much must depend upon the character of the Chief Magistrate of the Province : and we regard it as a token for good that God, in his providence, has so ordered it that the Representative of our Sovereign, at this juncture, is a man who possesses high talents, and whose mind, we fondly trust, is imbued with religious truths—who holds and wishes to exemplify liberal and patriotic principles. In a word, with such men at the head of affairs, have we not, under God, much to hope, and if the people are but faithful to the Government, and true to themselves, little indeed to fear.

This leads us to remark, briefly, that you are now specially called upon, Brethren, to exemplify ardent loyalty and unshaken attachment to the Government and constitution under which you live. Obedience to rulers in what is right, is a christian duty, and must not be resolved into mere expediency, or dealt with according to the calculations of a low selfishness. While rulers are God's ministers for good, are a terror to evil doers, and a praise and protection to those

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who do well, they must be revered, they must be upheld. Let not, then, past slights, or even injustice, rendered peculiarly painful by insult which you as a body may have sustained from certain persons clothed with authority, in the Province, cause you now to withhold your aid from the Government. Let it be known to all men that your loyalty at least is not the loyalty of expediency, depending on mere contingencies, but the loyalty of principles drawn from the word of the living God. Let it be known that you honour the Sovereign, and will not meddle with them that are given to change, because you fear God and honour Him, who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And, oh, let it never be said of you, that the day of your country's calamity, was a day desired for revenge, the revenge either of sullen indifference or of active hostility. Did we apprehend any thing of this, instead of now addressing you in confidence, we should not know where to hide our heads for shame. But, no, Brethren, if we are again to be assailed by traitors within the Colony, or by banditti from without, we have merely to say, that of your loyalty and firmness, we entertain not a doubt. We do not need to stir up your courage, or confirm your loyalty. You have inherited both these qualities from sires who have seldom turned their backs on the foe, and never yet turned their backs on the throne. Throw yourselves, then, *if the worst comes to the worst*, betwixt the Government of the country and these enemies of all law and order. And when the common danger is repelled, and this insolence and madness of rebellion for ever driven from the land, then turn your faces to the Legislature and the Throne, and demand, as one man, with uplifted voice, what British justice cannot, and will not, withhold.

And need we add, in fine, that as Christian men you will look to the Great God as your judge and protector in these times. If it be incumbent upon us in ordinary circumstances constantly to realize a present God, whose eye is ever on us, whose goodness supplies all our wants, and whose Almighty arm alone protects us from evil, surely Brethren, it is peculiarly proper, in times of difficulty and danger, to exercise strong faith in the goodness, wisdom and power of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He whose care extends to the meanest creatures, will not forsake his own children amidst perplexities and trials. It is true, alas how painful the truth, that we have by our many sins, more especially our unfaithfulness to our Christian obligations, grievously provoked the Lord, not only to chastise us, but to give us over to death. Yet, Brethren, our God hath not forgotten to be gracious. In sincere penitence flee to him for mercy through the blood of his Son. To a prayer hearing God make your supplications, and on a covenant-keeping God cast all your care. For, be assured of it, Dear Brethren, that the man who has his peace made with Him that ruleth in the armies of Heaven and among the inha-

bitants of the earth, is of all men the best prepared for acting with calmness, firmness and courage, amidst those scenes that are most fitted to try the human soul.

In name and by appointment of the Commission,

ALEXANDER GALE,

Convener of Commission.

City of Toronto, }
November 15th, 1838. }